

Prescribing guidance for NHS patients who travel abroad.

Patients travelling abroad for more than three months.

The NHS accepts responsibility for supplying on-going medication for temporary periods abroad of up to three months. If a person is going to be abroad for more than three months, then all that the patient is entitled to at NHS expense is a sufficient supply of his/her regular medication to get to the destination and find an alternative supply of that medication. It is also worth advising that some UK prescription only medicines can be purchased without a prescription from pharmacies in some countries.

NHS England has a duty to remove any patient from the list of a practice if they are informed that the patient has “been absent from the United Kingdom for a period of more than three months”. The test for the practice informing NHS England ought to be this person has retained a sufficient connection to the UK to continue to be habitually resident here and thus can justify remaining on the practice list.

Patients travelling for three months or less.

Under legislation, the NHS ceases to have responsibility for people when they leave the UK. People travelling within Europe should be advised to carry the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) at all times; this gives entitlement to local health care arrangements. Patients are advised to check specific entitlements and appropriate health advice prior to travel and obtain adequate holiday insurance cover. See link on NHS Choices website.

Just-in case treatments

An NHS prescription should not be provided for medication which is requested solely in anticipation of the onset of an ailment whilst outside the UK, but for which treatment is not required at the time of prescribing (e.g., travel sickness, altitude sickness). Patients should be advised to purchase these items locally prior to travel; advice is available from community pharmacists if required.

Taking controlled drugs abroad

Department of Health guidance recommends that, in general, prescriptions for controlled drugs should be limited to a supply of up to 30 days treatment.

Controlled drugs should be:

- carried in original packaging
- carried in hand luggage (airline regulations permitting)
- carried with a valid personal import/export licence (if necessary; see below)

Persons travelling abroad (or visitors travelling to the UK) in excess of three months and carrying controlled drugs will require a personal export or import licence. A personal licence has no legal standing outside the UK and is intended to assist travellers passing through UK customs controls with their prescribed controlled drugs. It is always advisable to contact the embassy, consulate, or high commission of the country to be visited regarding their policy on the import of controlled drugs, as the legal status of UK prescription only (POM) controlled drugs varies between countries.

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